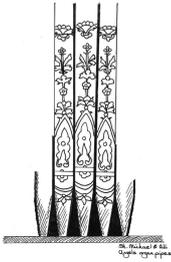


All Services & Events Postponed or Cancelled

Services at St John the Baptist Halling and the Jubilee Hall Upper Halling			
5 th April Lent 6 Palm Sunday	8.00 Holy Communion Jubilee Hall	Philippians 2 vv 5-11 p1179 Matthew 27 vv 1-54 p998	
	11.00 Holy Communion	Isaiah 50 vv 4-11 p737 Philippians 2 vv 5-11 p1179 Matthew 27 vv 1-54 p998 (BCP Gospel)	
9 th April Maundy Thursday	9.30 Holy Communion	I Corinthians 11 vv 17-34 p1152 Luke 23 vv 1-49 p1059	
10 th April Good Friday	12.00 Three Hour Devotion		
12 th April Easter Day	11.00 Holy Communion	Jeremiah 31 vv 1-6 p791 Acts 10 vv 34-43 p1104 Colossians 3 vv 1-4 p1184 Matthew 28 vv 1-10 p1000	
19 th April Easter 1 / Easter 2	11.00 Holy Communion	Exodus 14 vv 10-31 p71 Exodus 15 vv 20&21 p73 Acts 2 vv 14-32 I Peter 1 vv 3-9 p1217 John 20 vv 19-31 p1089	
26 th April Easter 2 / Easter 3	11.00 Holy Communion	Zephaniah 3 vv 14-20 p947 Acts 2 vv 14-41 p1093 I Peter 1 vv 17-23 p1217 Luke 24 vv 13-35 p1061	
Services at St Michael & All Angels Cuxton			
5 th April Lent 6 Palm Sunday	9.30 Family Communion (procession starting at church hall)	Matthew 21 vv 1-11 p988 (at hall) Isaiah 50 vv 4-11 p737 Philippians 2 vv 5-11 p1179 Matthew 27 vv 1-54 p998 (BCP Gospel)	
9 th April Maundy Thursday	Passover Supper 7.00 pm Church Hall		
10 th April Good Friday	10.00 Family Service		
12 th April Easter Day	9.30 Holy Communion	Jeremiah 31 vv 1-6 p791 Acts 10 vv 34-43 p1104 Colossians 3 vv 1-4 p1184 Matthew 28 vv 1-10 p1000	
19 th April Easter 1 / Easter 2	9.30 Holy Communion	Exodus 14 vv 10-31 p71 Exodus 15 vv 20&21 p73 Acts 2 vv 14-32 I Peter 1 vv 3-9 p1217 John 20 vv 19-31 p1089	
26 th April Easter 2 / Easter 3	9.30 Holy Communion	Zephaniah 3 vv 14-20 p947 Acts 2 vv 14-41 p1093 I Peter 1 vv 17-23 p1217 Luke 24 vv 13-35 p1061	
Holy Communion Wednesdays 9.30 am Cuxton		Holy Communion Thursdays 9.30 am Halling	
1 st April	Daniel 3 John 8 vv 31-42	2 nd April	Genesis 17 vv 3-9 John 8 vv 51-59
8 th April Wednesday in Holy Week	Hebrews 9 vv 16-28 Luke 22 vv 1-71	9 th April Maundy Thursday	I Corinthians 11 vv 17-34 Luke 23 vv 1-49
15 th April Wednesday in Easter Week	Acts 3 vv 1-10 Luke 24 vv 13-35	16 th April Thursday in Easter Week	Acts 3 vv 11-26 Luke 24 vv 35-48
22 nd April	Acts 5 vv 17-26 John 3 vv 16-21	23 rd April S George	II Timothy 2 vv 3-13 John 15 vv 18-21
29 th April	Acts 8 vv 1-8 John 6 vv 35-40	30 th April	Acts 8 vv 26-40 John 6 vv 44-51



The 75th Anniversary of VE Day

This falls on the 8th May, which will be a bank holiday this year (instead of Monday 4th). We shall mark the anniversary on Sunday 10th at our 9.30 am service of Holy Communion at St Michael's and our 11.00

service of Holy Communion at St John's. Important events in our lives as individuals, - such as births, deaths and marriages – and such significant occasions in the life of our community and nation as the commemoration of VE Day are appropriately marked in Church. It is God Who makes sense of our lives. It is God upon Whom we depend for our lives. It is to God that we pray, God we thank, God Who supplies us with the wisdom we need in order to live our lives and God to Whom we confess our failures. We cannot do without God and it is vital that we acknowledge Him in all our ways. *For in him, we live, and move, and have our being.*

So I need to prepare a service and a sermon for the commemoration of VE Day and that is not as simple as it might appear. None of these things are – Remembrance Sunday, Battle of Britain Day and other similar dates in the calendar. War brings out the best and the worst in people. We are duty bound to honour the nobility of sacrifice while deprecating sadism. War is in itself a terrible thing, yet, if we believe that we are fighting in a just war, victory is something to celebrate, something even for which to pray and to thank God for if we achieve it. We go all out for victory, yet the people we are fighting – even if their cause is unjust – are still people, people like us. Good people fighting heroically in a noble cause are nevertheless constrained to kill and injure the enemy, to destroy the enemy's means of carrying on the conflict – roads and railways, munitions factories and even his home – and to take part in the general devastation and destruction which is the inevitable consequence of war. Hardship – famine and plague even - only too often follow from turning cornfields into battlefields, siege, movements of vast numbers of people, destruction of sanitary arrangements, disruption of water supplies and the general breakdown of order. Good men and women are put under extreme pressure to act in ways which are quite contrary to their true nature. How do we celebrate what is good without seeming to glorify what is evil?

Then there is the question of who is likely to be attending such services. Their numbers are becoming fewer, but there will be people there who remember the war or who at least were brought up with stories of family members who never came back and the hardships their parents' generation endured. There may well be currently serving military personnel and their families or people who have fought in conflicts which have occurred since 1945. These adults perhaps have terrible memories to think about, fallen comrades to remember, fathers, uncles, brothers who lost their lives fighting for our country. It might be important to them to sing the hymns and to say the prayers they grew up with or with which they are familiar from attending church parades. The sermon and the service need to honour them and their achievements and especially to show proper respect and gratitude to those who made the ultimate sacrifice.

There could be people present whose countries were on the other side in the conflicts we remember. We pray together for peace. We seek reconciliation and unity. But we also have to accept that the horrors of war are not something you can "just get over", carelessly putting behind you suffering and sin. We do seek forgiveness – forgiveness for what we ourselves have done wrong and the grace to forgive what others have done to us – but forgiveness is not cheap or easy. The cost is measured in that Jesus gave His life that we might be forgiven. *Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God.*

Most people alive in the world today who can remember the Second World must have been children in the years in which it was being fought. They will have memories of rationing, air raids, perhaps the deaths of schoolmates. Many of them will have been evacuated, living far from home with people they had not previously known. They may have been parted from their fathers for so long that they could hardly remember them and some of them never would never have seen their fathers again, or their fathers might have come home broken men, unable to provide for their families. Adults would be working long hours with war work, fire-watching, home guard and similar in addition to their normal duties and therefore often tired. On the other hand, there was a lot of excitement, especially for children and more freedom to do their own thing, certainly much more than there is today. Nobody was not

needed. Everybody mattered. There was a strong common purpose to see it through and to come out on top. Those born in the war or immediately before it would never have known anything different.

I hope there will be many children at our services for the VE Day anniversary, but what to say to them? We need to tell them enough for them to understand how serious all this is, but not to give them nightmares. We have to enlist the up and coming generation in the cause of world peace. Sometimes, on Remembrance Sunday, I look from my prayer desk at all those young people, especially the teenagers, and think about how many of the lads who went out to fight in the two world wars were not very much older than these boys and girls are now. I pray, we all pray, that these young people will never experience anything like that.

From time to time, we clergy are asked to think about the issue of recruiting young people to the armed services. If we believe that there are times when a nation must be prepared to fight in a just cause and in its own defence, we do have to recruit the next generation of soldiers, sailors and airmen. It is an honourable profession. It has to be. If a country fills the ranks of its armed services with the dregs of humanity, war crimes are inevitable. To serve in the British armed forces is a great career choice for the right sort of young person. It can be a noble choice. There is a camaraderie, a goal, a purpose in life, an ultimate loyalty. There is training in physical and mental fitness. There are plenty of opportunities to develop skills and to learn, to play sport and to take up many kinds of stimulating activity. There are many good reasons for recommending our brightest and best young people to a military career. And yet we are putting them in a position where they might have to kill, or to be killed themselves. Nobody should ever have to be put in that position.

But, back to what should be in the service: a talk which explains the seriousness of what we are commemorating without terrifying the children; a talk which instils a proper sense of respect and gratitude for what other people have done on our behalf in ages past and are still doing overseas today; a commitment to take care of servicemen and women and their families, especially those

who have been wounded or otherwise changed by the experience of battle, or who have lost those close to them in war; a commitment to work for peace in our own generation. But what else? For what ever reasons, we have not passed onto our children the hymns and prayers we grew up with, with which very often our parents and grandparents also grew up. In fact, most children and young adults today know very few hymns and prayers. They may feel that they do not belong at our service if we only have the music of fifty and a hundred years ago, but, older people might feel that there is something missing if we do not, or that some of the more child-friendly songs and choruses lack the gravitas required by such a solemn occasion. I have been forced to compromise and I hope the whole community of every age will feel at home in our Church which is there for everybody who lives here, not just for me or for those who attend every week. If we are open-minded, however old or young we are, we can recognise that there is good in the old and the new. It is no accident that one of the most successful hymnbooks ever published is called *Hymns Ancient and Modern*. Jesus said: *Therefore every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old.*

So, what of war? In the Bible, there is the story of David and Goliath. Goliath was the champion of the Philistine army. He was a huge man and an accomplished warrior. He challenged the entire Israelite army to put forward one man who would fight him. David was a shepherd boy and he was the only Israelite ready to take up Goliath's challenge. Goliath was clad in armour, carried a sword and a spear, and he had a magnificent shield born before him. David wore the clothes of a shepherd boy and was armed with a slingshot. David first knocked out Goliath with a slung stone and then he killed the mighty warrior with Goliath's own sword. David was brave. He was smarter than Goliath, using a weapon which could strike his adversary while his enemy could not get to him. David had God on his side. Instinctively, we admire David and we may well want to be like him. If the Israelites had succumbed to the Philistines, quite possibly their culture and religion, everything the Jews have contributed to the human story, would have been lost for ever. The Philistines worshipped a fish! It was to Israel

that the LORD initially revealed Himself in the Law and the Prophets as the one true God, Who created heaven and earth, Who sustains every one of us on our life's journey, Who guides and supports us in all the challenges we face, and Who has prepared at His side a place for all people of all nations (including the Philistines) who turn to Him in faith. *And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.* Had the Philistines won that battle, no doubt many Israelites would have been killed, their wives raped, their goods pillaged, their homes plundered and destroyed.

Nazism was an evil. Its advance appeared to be inexorable. Many people at the start of the Second World War saw a parallel with the bible story. Britain was David standing up to the Philistine Nazis and, of course, eventually we (and our allies in the Empire and Commonwealth, the US, the USSR, etc.) overcame the evil empire. We are right to be thankful that we did and modern Germans and the present day citizens of the countries which were then the Nazis' allies are as grateful as we are. Thank God for the defeat of fascism.

And yet we surely feel that there must be a better way than to kill the enemy's soldiers, to bomb his cities. Jesus is the descendant of David, *great David's greater son*. Can we imagine Jesus slaying Goliath or firing a machine gun into a platoon of enemy soldiers or dropping bombs on an enemy city? Is it unrealistic to want to follow Jesus rather than to copy David? Wouldn't David be of more use than Jesus if we were under attack by an evil power? Following Jesus would certainly be very costly and very risky.

This thought brings me back to the other aspect of our services on 10th May. As well as hymns and prayers, bible readings and a sermon, they will be celebrations of Holy Communion. Holy Communion is the service which Jesus told us to perform. Holy Communion remembers that God the Father gave His own Son to die for His people. Holy Communion is about self-sacrifice. It proclaims forgiveness to all those who come with penitent hearts in faith. Holy Communion affirms our brotherhood – with Jesus and with one another. It is the Sacrament of brotherly love. Holy Communion is about unwavering, whole-hearted commitment. The Bread and Wine of Holy Communion are a promise and a foretaste of our eternal life in Christ. Holy Communion proclaims the coming of God's Kingdom, His Kingdom of justice, mercy and peace. Holy Communion is Jesus yesterday, today and forever.

There are many things to consider and to think about when we think about war - which brings out the best and the worst in people and so drastically determines the course of human history for good and ill. Many of these issues are too deep for me to resolve and, no doubt, for you too. I am sure, however, that their final resolution is in the Death and Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ (*God, of the substance of the Father, begotten before the worlds : and Man of the substance of his Mother, born in the world*), the story we tell at Easter and experience weekly (if we accept His invitation) in the Sacrament of Holy Communion. Whatever happens to us and to the world we live in, we cling onto Him in faith. He will not let us down. Roger.

Give peace in our time, O Lord.

Because there is none other that fighteth for us, but only thou, O God.

O God, make clean our hearts within us.

And take not thy holy Spirit from us.

O GOD, who art the author of peace and lover of concord, in knowledge of whom standeth our eternal life, whose service is perfect freedom; Defend us thy humble servants in all assaults of our enemies; that we, surely trusting in thy defence, may not fear the power of any adversaries, through the might of Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*

O GOD, from whom all holy desires, all good counsels, and all just works do proceed; Give unto thy servants that peace which the world cannot give; that both our hearts may be set to obey thy commandments, and also that by thee, we, being defended from the fear of our enemies, may pass our time in rest and quietness; through the merits of Jesus Christ our Saviour. *Amen.*

Unprofessional Clergy

We usually think of a profession as a high status occupation for which candidates must qualify by natural aptitude and hard work: doctors, lawyers, teachers, army officers, accountants, for example. Professional bodies set their members high professional standards which they are expected to live up to as a matter of conscience and personal pride. Professions serve the public and professional people are deserving of our respect. They have earned it. As well as maintaining high standards in the practice of their professions, professional bodies serve as advocates for their members, protecting their interests, defending them from unfair criticism, facilitating their work and representing their needs to government.

Over the last couple of hundred years, the clergy have come to be regarded as professionals – both in a good way and a bad way. Bishop Anthony Russell wrote a book called “The Clerical Profession.” In recent years, the Church of England has issued “Guidelines for the Professional Conduct of the Clergy.”

From the Restoration of Charles II nearly until the reign of Queen Victoria, Oxford and Cambridge were the only two universities in England and only members of the Church of England were allowed to study or teach there. It was rather assumed that Oxford and Cambridge men would be fit persons to be ordained and to serve as clergy in the Church of England. In fact, many positions in the universities required that the holders were ordained. As the nineteenth century progressed, it came to be realised that not all graduates were suitable men to be ordained and also that those who were called needed more preparation than the universities afforded. Theological Colleges were set up where ordinands (those preparing for ordination) lived together, worshipped and prayed together, and studied together the specific subjects which a rector or vicar would be expected to have some knowledge of. In this respect, the clergy were becoming more like professionals. This is generally regarded to have been a good development. But clergy could be thought of as professionals in a bad way too. In an upper class family, the eldest son was expected to inherit and run the estate, but what of his younger brothers? The smart ones might become lawyers or doctors. The brave scions of the aristocracy joined the army or the navy. Becoming a vicar was a soft option for a lad who was neither bright enough for the law or medicine, nor of sufficient mettle to serve in her majesty’s armed services. I remember my grandmother saying, when I was a child, somewhat disparagingly that, for the ministers of other churches, their work was in response to God’s call – a vocation – whereas for Church of England clergy, ministry was only a profession.

And when you think about it, if a profession is a high status occupation for which candidates must qualify by natural aptitude and hard work, that doesn’t sit easily with our Christian thinking. Christians ought to be indifferent to status. We do not qualify to be clergy by our own efforts. God calls us despite our unworthiness. We do not deserve respect because we have a high social status or because we have worked hard and passed examinations. God can choose anyone He pleases to be ordained, not weighing our merits, but pardoning our offences (in the same way as He accepts the service of all Christians). God supplies us with the grace we need in order to do our work. He may well use schools and colleges, courses and conferences, books and the internet to teach us what we need to know, but the glory is His, not ours.

Being a vicar or rector differs from being a professional in several other ways too. Clergy do not have clients, pupils, customers or patients. We have parishioners, all of whom are neighbours, many of whom are friends. Unlike policemen and postmen we do not have any clear distinction between when we are on duty and when we are off duty. Moreover, most of the things we do as clergy are the same things as all the baptised might be called upon to do: evangelism, pastoral care, teaching the faith, service in the community. It is only in presiding at worship (especially the Sacraments) and preaching that we are privileged to exercise a ministry peculiar to ourselves and, even so, authorised lay people can also undertake some of these duties. I had a pub lunch in Cuxton recently with somebody who does not live here on my day off. It suddenly struck him. He said, “You are never really off duty are you?” He was right. Rector of Cuxton and Halling is not my profession or job. It is not what I do. It is what I am. It is my calling. We make a bad mistake when we think of ordained ministry as though it were a job or a profession. It is a matter of being here simply to serve God and the community. That, I think, has been the genius of the Church of England.

Relationships

A little boy tells his father that he has decided whom he wants to marry when he grows up. She loves him. She's a good cook. She's fun to be with. "Who's that, son?" the man replies. "Granny," says the little boy. "You can't marry my mother!" his dad explains. "Why not?" says the little boy. "You married my mother."

Stamp Collecting

I don't really understand philately but I know what I lick.

What Happened to Dr Percy II

A couple of months ago we reported on the case of the Very Reverend Martyn Percy Dean of Christ Church Oxford – which is both the college chapel and cathedral for the Diocese of Oxford. In 2018 Dr Percy was accused of "immoral, scandalous or disgraceful conduct". He was made ill by the allegations and suspended from his job. It took a year for him to be exonerated. Nearly all the accusations (with one very minor exception) were proved to be both false and malicious. Sir Andrew Smith, a high court judge so ruled after an 11 day hearing last year. It transpires that the cost to the college of this disgraceful case is nearer £1,000,000 than the £500,000 first reported. For some reason Sir Andrew's judgment has never been published in full. As such other highly respected judges as Sir James Mumby have pointed out, a lack of transparency in judicial processes undermines public confidence in the system. One cannot help but wonder what the college has to hide. According to the *Times*, extracts from the judgment leaked to *The Mail on Sunday* have revealed how other members of the college mocked Dr Percy and called for him to leave Christ Church. One wrote: "I'm always ready to think the worst of him. Does anyone know any good poisoners?" Another imagined "the Inspector Morse episode we could make when his wrinkly withered little body" was found in Osney Lock, on the Thames in Oxford. Dr Percy is now pursuing his own legal action against the college which has treated him so badly and it is thought that the legal bill will eventually reach £2,000,000. The college still owes several hundred thousand pounds in legal fees to Professor Percy. This is not a case heard under the Clergy Discipline Measure, but it does demonstrate what happens when an institution's disciplinary procedures are inefficient and unfair and unable to distinguish between malicious and genuine complaints.

Quotation

"Love exists in action or it does not exist at all." Gerald O' Collins.



Rochester Bridge

There was some interest expressed concerning bridges over the River Medway at Rochester. This photograph, by courtesy of Rochester Bridge Trust (and not to be reproduced without their consent), was taken in 1914. It shows what is now the westbound road bridge under construction. This was to replace a Victorian stone bridge which had itself replaced the mediaeval bridge. Before that, of course, there had been a Roman bridge at Rochester. The bridge of 1914 was needed to accommodate increased traffic flow and larger vehicles such as buses.

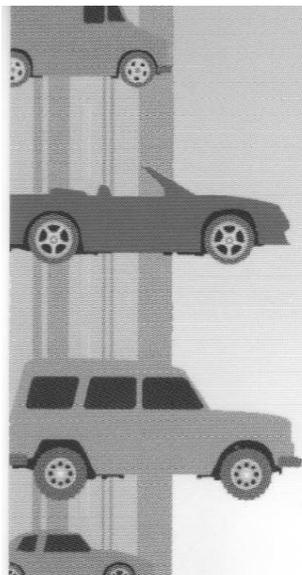
The next bridge downstream in the picture is the original railway bridge over the Medway constructed by the London, Chatham & Dover Railway. This was the line which served Rochester Bridge Station on the Strood side and still runs to Victoria via Sole Street. You can just see the railway bridge later constructed by the South Eastern Railway at the edge of the picture. Since the early C20 century this has carried all rail traffic over the river and, fifty years ago, the LC&DR bridge was removed and replaced with what is now the eastbound road bridge. In order to improve the access from Strood, the old Kent Messenger bridge which carried the SER line from Strood to Cuxton was replaced in order to allow for road widening.

The Book of Common Prayer & the English Sense of Humour

I like a good joke and I am very fond of the Book of Common Prayer, but I had never made a connection until I read a speech by Fergus Butler-Gallie published in *The Prayer Book Today*. The first point is that the Prayer Book is so much part of our culture. For centuries, people who couldn't read had the Bible and the BCP read to them weekly in Church. Most homes where people could read would have had copies of the Bible and the BCP and read them at home. The result is a lot of phrases buzzing around which we use in humour and other talk perhaps without even realising where they come from. This will get less if people continue to deprive themselves of reading these sacred texts, but it will take a lot of shifting from the mass consciousness. Butler-Gallie gives the example of Dawn French in a sitcom seeming to confuse God as *the author of peace and lover of concord* with the aircraft of the same name which no longer flies. (There was a Bishop of Birmingham, Hugh Montefiore, who always opposed the Concorde project and churches might leave out that prayer when he was visiting.)

There is also the huge influence the BCP and the King James Version of Bible have on the way we speak and write. The strong and simple rhythms of the BCP are reflected in the way we construct jokes. It is remarkable how often phrases or nouns come in threes in prayers and funny stories: *O God from whom all holy desires, all good counsels and all just works do proceed; there was an Englishman, an Irishman and a Scots man who went into a bar.*

More cogently, however, Butler-Gallie points out the BCP's realistic understanding of what it is to be human as the thing which underpins our sense of humour. (Humour is how we cope with life.) He says: *Most importantly, though, the English sense of humour owes something, I would venture, to Cranmer's conception of what it is to be human. His theology of mankind, his anthropology of faith. In short, Cranmer understood that this ludicrous aspect of the human condition was both wicked and pitiable. Worthy of mockery (comparable to worms and lost sheep) but also, through the inestimable mechanism of grace, redeemable as well. Lemuel Gulliver, Tristram Shandy, Mr Micawber, Archdeacon Grantly, each and every one of the Pirates of Penzance, Bertie Wooster, the Steptoes, Rigsby, Basil Fawlty, Hyacinth Bucket, David Brent, Mark Corrigan, Fleabag—this list of the titanic characters of the world of British humour, both written and on the screen—these are characters we are encouraged to laugh at, and rightly so for their follies, but also to view as redeemable, with an element of reticent affection. Herein is Cranmerian anthropology writ large. And in each case, it is funny.*



CUXTON AUTO SERVICES
Servicing/Repairs/MOT Centre
Yusuf Oomar
Workshop Manager/MOT Tester
Malcolm Petts
Service Manager/MOT Tester
1 Sundridge Hill
Cuxton
Rochester ME2 1LH
01634 717987
www.cuxtonautoservices.co.uk

Forthcoming Attractions

28th March 7.30: Albert Marshall Reminisce Musical Evening in Church Hall
9th April 7.00 pm Passover Supper, church hall.
11th April: XKids St John's 2.00 – 4.00 pm
13th April 2.00 pm Easter Egg Hunt Rectory Grounds.
25th April 9.30: St Mark's Day HC, Vestry Meeting & APCM St Michael's Church & Hall
24th June 2020 (Nativity of St John the Baptist): 11.00 Holy Communion St John's followed by pudding party.

9th July 7.30: Cantium Singers @ St John's.

**Easter Egg Hunt
Cancelled**

From the Registers

Funerals:

28th February
2nd March
5th March

Janet Irene Humphrey
Raymond Maisey
David John Wilson

Ladywood Road
Charles Drive
Harold Road

Mary Acott RIP

Parishioners were sorry to hear of the death of Mary Acott on 8th March. Mary was a very faithful member of our parish churches, serving as churchwarden and on the parochial church council. Mary was very involved in our children's work at Halling and had a leading role in WAGs, a study and fellowship group mainly for young mothers. Mary also served for many years as clerk to Halling Parish Council and was involved in implementing many of the Council's projects in the community. She was also active in the Historical Society, as well as serving as treasurer for many years of the Jubilee Hall Committee, and generally took a lively and helpful interest in many of the things which went on in the village until she retired to Tonbridge a few years ago.

St Michael's Draw (March): £10 to Mrs Saunders (29), £5.00 each to Mr Coombes (37) & Mrs Booth (21).
St John's Draw (February): £10 each Mrs Burren (55) & Mrs Shaw (102) – drawn by Mrs Smitherman.

Blessed Are the Poor

I was asked recently why did Jesus say *Blessed are the poor*? He actually said two slightly different things. Luke 6²⁰: *Blessed be ye poor: for yours is the kingdom of God* and Matthew 5³: *Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*. The kingdom of God and the kingdom of heaven are the same thing. So there is no difference there. There does appear to be a difference between *poor in spirit* and just *poor*. I'm not quite sure what that difference is. It could be that *poor in spirit* means not only poor in the sense of not having much to live on, but also oppressed, depressed and subjugated, The New English Bible translates Matthew 5³: *How blest are those who know their need of God; the kingdom of Heaven is theirs*. That's stretching the Greek quite a bit, but it might be pointing us in the right direction. While we're on the subject of the Greek, the word translated *blessed* could also be translated *happy*. Happy are the poor.

And that does seem odd. I can't imagine that I should be happy if I were hungry or cold or homeless, if I were worried about debts I couldn't pay, if I were out of work, if my pension were insufficient to live on, or indeed if I lived in a country where we natives were oppressed and subjugated by a foreign power. Might I feel blessed if any of those things were true? Perhaps my relationship with God would be so strong that I could feel blessed and be thankful however poor I might be. I don't know. S Paul says, *For I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content* (Philippians 4¹¹).

Maybe, it's looking to the future. Jesus told a parable about a poor man, Lazarus, who led a miserable, hungry, diseased life at the gate of a rich man who was *clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day*. When they were both dead, Lazarus went to heaven and the rich man went to hell. Is that why the poor are said to be blessed? Surely, one point of the story is that those of us who can should share the good things we have with the poor. The main point of that story, however, (Luke 16) is that people won't listen to such straightforward teaching even if One rises from the dead!

So often in the Bible God expresses concern for the poor that the poor have been described as His preferential option. Time and again, those with the means to do so are exhorted to be generous to the poor. So it cannot be God's Will that they remain in poverty. Indeed, in many places the Bible talks about the wise and faithful person as one who will prosper. Jesus tells us that if we feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, clothe the naked, take in the stranger, and visit the sick and the prisoner, it is as though we did those things for Him (Matthew 25³¹⁻⁴⁶). S Paul says of Jesus: *For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich* (II Corinthians 8⁹). Jesus is our example as well as our teacher.

The Book of Proverbs sees both riches and poverty as possible snares and prays for moderation. *Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain* (Proverbs 30^{8&9}).

What the poor might have is a better sense of proportion than the rich. They perhaps realise better than the rich what really matters in life. They could be more able to recognise that we all depend on God for everything. Those of us who are better off might think we can do without God, relying on our own possessions and power to save us, and think that getting rich is a worthwhile goal in life in itself. Again S Paul warns us: *And having food and raiment let us be therewith content. But they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows* (I Timothy 6⁸⁻¹⁰).

Let's conclude with the words of Jesus: *But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also* (Matthew 6^{20&21}).

If anyone else has any questions we could tackle in this magazine, please just ask. Roger.

Horrid Hill to Motney Hill

My walk begins at Riverside Country Park and takes me through a variety of habitats alongside the Medway Estuary on a section of the Saxon Shore Way. The entrance to the Riverside Country Park is in Lower Rainham Road, Gillingham. There is a good car park with picnic areas, a cafe, a visitor centre with facilities, an interesting adventure play area and ponds as well



as an excellent view point across the estuary with an informative display board and directional signposts. From the car park I walk up to the viewpoint. Here, to my left, I can see Horrid Hill, Sharp's Green Bay with abandoned water craft and the Eastcourt Meadows.

There is a large information board pointing out the various landmarks, a little local history and details of the wildlife. I descend and walk along the spacious path towards Horrid Hill. The path turns right. It is lined by rocks and concrete to prevent erosion. There are several large puddles and warning signs about flooding especially during high tides. Many, many years ago there was a railway jetty here serving an industrial site involved in cement production. The location provided docks for cement export and the landing of clay which combined with chalk from nearby Twydall provided the main two ingredients for cement. There is a plethora of wildlife, such as worms, crabs and shellfish to provide food for sea birds and fish around this area of the park. The tide is out; so there are many birds, gulls, common terns and other waders digging their bills into the mud flats to search for food. In spite of the bracing breeze, I walk to the furthest point of Horrid Hill then turn back to walk towards my starting point visiting Sharps Green Pond on route. This is a man-made pond rustling with reeds. There are smaller birds twittering and rushing between the reeds and bushes. They seem very busy and ignore my presence.

I pass the starting point at the view-point and head towards Motney Hill. The pathway is easy



to follow with just a few muddy puddles but many walkers and happy dogs on leads. The air remains bracing but there are points of interest on route.

The mud flats, on my left, are littered with wading birds whose feet have left intriguing patterns in the mud. Ducks are feeding in the muddy channels. There is a screen of bushes to my right. Small hedge sparrows provide constant interest. Beyond the bushes, there are fields with grazing horses and, to my delight, many rabbits. The rabbits all look rather large and lively but there are no kits in evidence yet. Further along this footpath there is a slipway, still in use today usually during high tides. Out beyond the slipway there are old wrecks. Some were wooden craft which worked here in days gone-by. My next point of interest is Bloors Wharf. This dates back to Elizabethan times and has a long history in commerce. There was once a dock here which bustled with barges unloading clay for processing at the Motney Hill Cement Works and loading the

finished product, cement. Work stopped here in 1936 but the site was not demolished until the 1970s.

From Bloors Wharf I head north and rejoin the Saxon Shore Way to walk to the far side of Motney Hill then down to Otterham Creek. The paths are increasingly muddy and much of the surrounding grassland is flooded. Walking down to and around Otterham Creek is rather tricky and reaching the end of the path at Otterham Quay is a relief. It felt good to place my feet on solid ground.

The weather has been varied and poor during this walk. However I have enjoyed it because there have been so many interesting things and much wildlife to see. I have seen evidence of spring



arriving within the bushes, plants and trees. In just a month or so everywhere will be green and lush. Young rabbits and lambs will abound in the fields and birds' nests will be occupied. I hope that all this rotten rain will clear

soon and the warm spring will fill our days. Holly Croft.

Corona Virus

We are told not to meet together. I will continue to pray for all of you and on your behalf (as I do anyway) and, if permitted, I will leave at least St Michael's Church open as a place for personal prayer. If you find yourself isolated and need help, please make contact with me or with friends and family or with other professionals. You might need someone to get your medicine or food. You might want to ask for prayer. You might just want someone to talk to, even if only on the 'phone or online. But don't suffer alone. Roger.

The World Day of Prayer – Friday 6th March

The World Day of Prayer was held in St. John's Church, Halling. We always enjoy getting together for this annual service, especially with representation from the three churches, the United Reform Church, Cuxton, St. Michael's Church, Cuxton and St. John's Church, Halling.

As we participate in this service, we are joining with people in over 120 countries and islands around the world. Each year the service is written by a different country. This year it had been prepared by the Christian women of Zimbabwe who call us to "Rise! Take up your mat and walk". We were encouraged to reflect on the difficulties and unrest that have plagued their country over many years. They shared the challenges they have met and the hopes they have for the future.

As we heard their stories, the challenge for them and for us is that we will constantly seek love, peace and reconciliation. Three of our ladies wore scarves to represent these issues – love (red) – peace (white) and reconciliation (yellow). During the service we were invited to write down on cards, our own commitments to support our communities with actions of love, peace and reconciliation. We hope to have a follow up session later, when we could put these issues into practice.

After the service we enjoyed a get together with tea, coffee and cakes. We thank the women of Zimbabwe for this service and pray that our response will be positive, as we commit ourselves to positive prayerful action. Jenny

Tommy's Talking Points.



Here I am in the armchair in our porch. You could say that this is my guard dog position. I can survey much of the garden from here, the front gate and the little path from the Church. Do I look ferocious? Well, perhaps not, but I do like sitting here and looking out. The porch is mainly glass and (the opposite of the living room) on the sunny side of the house. So while the lounge temperature languishes around 60F / 15C, it can be pleasantly warm in this little sanctuary. He feels guilty when he is leaving me alone in the house and looks back and I am sitting here all alone like this – though, when this particular picture was taken I was pausing in playing with some visitors we had regarding a pastoral matter. They had me pose.

Master likes to sit in here too when he is reading, but then he insists on having the chair and I get the door mat. His excuse is that I can get down onto and up off of the floor much more easily than he can. Speaking of which, the running was somewhat on hold for a bit. He managed to run in 55 minutes a distance that normally takes him an hour, roughly 14½ minute mileing instead of 15 minute mileing. (Roger Bannister achieved the four minute mile and that is par for the course for real runners nowadays). Still, if it makes him happy. He has been held back a bit by the weather. He thought the first verse of a hymn we sang on Ash Wednesday was very appropriate: *Be thou my guardian and my guide, and hear me when I call; let not my slippery footsteps slide, and hold me lest I fall.* His slippery footsteps certainly have been sliding, but he says the hymn isn't about walks in the wood. It's about asking to Jesus to protect us from our own folly and sin and the consequences thereof! This morning, it was really frosty and the mud was satisfactorily frozen, but we have had hours of rain since then and I am not expecting a 4.00 pm walk.

Since I wrote that, things have been looking up on the running front. The days are getting longer and we get to go out in the daylight earlier and later every day. This probably means that we shall see more dogs and people out, which is good for me because I am supposed to socialise, as is he! He likes to make an early start before Morning Prayer. We've had a couple of dry days and the paths are drying up nicely. He's actually running a little bit faster now. He won't be winning any marathons, but, from my point of view, it's a good thing. If he gets along faster, we get to go farther in the time available. There's a lot to see. There is still a wonderful display of snow drops where you go from Upper Bush out into the open countryside. There are white violets covering a large area on the path from Mayflower Heights up towards the woods. We've seen new born lambs and new born calves in Dean Valley. The lambs run to their mothers when they see us coming, but I don't chase farm animals and neither does Master. A large patch of very pale daffodils brightens up the Six Acre Wood where it slopes down in front of the seat on the top path. We've seen our first dead nettle of the year in flower. The stinging nettles are coming through. You can cook and eat the young nettles if you like, but the older ones might give you kidney stones! Instead, separate the fibres in the stems of the old nettles later in the year, spin them and weave them into clothes for the Summer. There are blue anemones in Halling Cemetery and in people's gardens and primroses and purple violets everywhere. The squirrels in Cuxton Churchyard enjoy being chased up the yew tree (or at least I hope they do because I enjoy chasing them). In the garden, hyacinths, daffodils, lungwort, the first forget me nots and polyanthus, possibly planted after previous Mothering Sundays. They even come up through the drive, Nature reclaiming what is rightfully hers. He's looking to see whether the cuttings he took from our shrubs last year will sprout again this year.

Wanted

Dead & Alive

Schrödinger's

Cat

I did tell you that he is keen on the heavenly bodies. *For I will consider thy heavens, even the works of thy fingers : the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained. What is man, that thou art mindful of him : and the son of man, that thou visitest him?* Well, lots of people told him how good the Museum of the Moon exhibition was in Rochester Cathedral. So he and a friend went and were suitably impressed. I missed out on that one, but at least I get to see the real moon on our nocturnal excursions. He saw this poster at the exhibition – not that I understand it, but he thinks it's funny.